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SUBJECT: VATICAN: IRAQI AMBASSADOR WARNS OF UNIFIED ISLAMIC THREAT

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CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, CDA, AMEMB VATICAN,
STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Summary: Iraqi Ambassador to the Holy See Yelda, sees severe consequences to western interests should radical Shia and Sunni factions ever put aside their differences and unite. Yelda, an Assyrian Christian, counseled the U.S. to take steps now to combat this possibility by portraying Iran as an anti-Arab Shia State bent on domination over Arab nations. Yelda said radical Islamic elements were recruiting western-looking women from Albania and Bosnia for nearly undetectable suicide missions in western nations and how efforts to recruit Arabic speakers by U.S.G. agencies were being exploited to infiltrate those agencies. Yelda, whose information sources are unclear, also discussed the presence of an active former regime network within Iraq's MFA.

An Unified Islamic Front Cannot Be Permitted

¶2. (C) Iraqi Ambassador to the Holy See Albert Yelda warned PolOffs in an August 28 meeting that the U.S. must take whatever steps are necessary to prevent the formation of a unified Islamic force throughout the world or we would all "suffer the consequences". Yelda stated that the coalescing of radical Sunni and Shia factions would be disastrous for the West, leading to an onslaught of world-wide terrorism. While moderate Shia and Sunni factions can cooperate without adverse consequences, Yelda counseled that the U.S. needs to take affirmative steps now to prevent the reality of a unified radical Sunni and Shiite coalition.

¶3. (C) The key to keeping radical Shia and Sunni forces from coalescing under a United Islamic Front said Yelda, is to isolate Iran from the Arab States and to never permit Iran to take a leadership role in the Islamic world. One way of accomplishing this goal, said Yelda, would be to ensure the Arab States never forget that it was Iran that had repeatedly attacked Iraq, an Arab nation with a Sunni population, during the Iran-Iraq War.

Yelda: Lebanon Conflict Was A Disaster For U.S.

14. (C) Addressing the recent conflict in Lebanon, Yelda said the end result could not have turned out worse for the United States and its allies. Israel, he said, should have been allowed sufficient time to eradicate Hezbollah entirely from Lebanon. Instead, we are now faced with an Arab world which sees Hezbollah as the victor and Iran as a supporter of Arab rights said Yelda. There is also new-found - and troubling - unity among Shia and Sunnis when the subject turns to this recent conflict.

Blue-Eyed and Blond: New Age Suicide Bombers

15. (C) Yelda warned of the growing menace from the recruitment of female suicide bombers from Albania, Bosnia, and other European countries. These bombers, unlike the female "Wafa" suicide bombers from Palestine and Sudan, will be extremely difficult to detect and stop in western countries because of their western features, said Yelda. What makes the recruitment of these western women especially insidious, said Yelda, is that they have no foundation in what it is to be a Muslim and cannot, therefore, interpret the Koran correctly for themselves.

October 2005 Vatican Attack Foiled

16. (C) Yelda claimed he had helped gather information used to foil an Islamist suicide plot to crash airplanes into St. Peter's Basilica in October 2005. The information was provided to Vatican security officials, said Yelda, which took measures to prevent the attack. Yelda further explained that Islamists view the Vatican as sympathetic to the West and Israel and was, therefore, a legitimate target.

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Former Regime Network Powerful Within MFA

17. (C) Remarking on how he was saddled with inexperienced and incompetent staff at his Embassy, Yelda said he had just received a new administrative officer who was older and more experienced. Regretfully, I cannot use him, said Yelda, because he was sent by the "former regime network" to keep an eye on me. (Comment: In scheduling our appointment, Yelda insisted on meeting away from the Iraqi Embassy because of privacy concerns. Interestingly, Yelda's personal staff assistant, who accompanied us to the meeting, is a Sri Lankan national).

18. (S) "I'm not sure why MFA Minister Zebari continues to allow these people to remain in positions of power" said Yelda, referring to the former regime personnel in Iraq's diplomatic service. Muhamed Mahmood Al-Ameli, Ambassador to Italy, is an example of a former regime member who should not have been allowed to continue, said Yelda. Yelda also mentioned the Iraqi Ambassador to Jordan, Atah Razak, formerly a senior MFA official as the ringleader of the former regime network within Iraq's MFA.

Watch the Interpreters

19. (C) Addressing the methods used by radical Islamic groups to target western powers, Yelda pointed to U.S. efforts to recruit Arabic speakers and interpreters as an example of a vulnerability the Islamists have exploited. "Your intelligence and immigration services have hired many dedicated Islamists as interpreters and translators," Yelda claimed. "These are not stupid people; as soon as your people started recruiting for Arabic speakers, the Islamists sent you their best and brightest in an effort to penetrate your government," he continued. Yelda

said the U.S. should watch exactly how these translators interpret the words of Islamists entering the U.S. "I guarantee you'll be surprised at what you hear," he concluded.

Comment

¶10. (S) During our conversation with Yelda, he frequently referred to "our network" as the source of the information he provided. It was clear he was not referring to any official Iraqi intelligence organization but rather an informal group with whom he was associated. Yelda never specified the exact nature of this organization other than saying "my information is very good" and "check out what I have told you in the past and you'll see that my information is good." Post would welcome Department guidance on whether/how to pursue any of this information with Yelda.

¶11. (S) Yelda, who is a christian affiliated with the Assyrian Church of the East, has met with Ambassadors Rooney and Nicholson in the past, and is very open to contact. His relationship with the Vatican and with other Iraqis in Rome is less clear as are his bona fides with respect to some of the information he provides. A Holy See official following Iraq told us recently that he had had little contact with Yelda, and made a vague allusion to "other interests" the ambassador might have. The top Iraqi churchman in Rome has not been complimentary about Yelda's diplomatic work here in recent conversations we have had. End Comment.

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